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I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN  
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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA ELECTION DAY COVERAGE - JUNE 30

REF: KUWAIT 2300

11. (U) Summary and comment: International broadcast coverage of the June 29 Kuwait National Assembly elections ran the gamut from near full-time coverage on Al-Arabiya to a brief mention late in the evening on BBC World. CNN, France 2, the New York Times and the Washington Post were among the major media that covered the elections on site or from afar. Kuwait public and private TV coverage was round-the-clock. The disparity of the quality of reporting between the public KTV1 channel and the private Al-Rai TV was stark. Kuwait TV presented polished but blandly rosy coverage of Election Day events. By contrast, private Al-Rai TV reported on long lines, frustrated voters, and accusations of malfeasance at polling sites. The disparate coverage highlights the inability of Kuwait public media to act as an effective public watchdog. There also was a notable disparity in the amount of election coverage provided by the Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera satellite channels, with the latter only offering sporadic reports from Kuwait. This disparity is a reflection of how Al-Jazeera views itself as a more broad-based international channel. It could also be viewed as a manifestation of strained ties between the channel and Kuwait due to Kuwait's support for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The extensive coverage provided by Al-Arabiya demonstrated the sharp interest in Gulf countries on women's participation in the Kuwaiti elections. On blog sites, Kuwaitis posted their sentiments about the historic nature of women voting for the first time. They also used this media to present their own analysis and to call for a continuation of the fight for political reform in Kuwait after Election Day. End summary and comment.

Kuwait Enjoys the Media Spotlight

12. (U) International broadcast coverage of the June 29 Kuwait National Assembly elections ran the gamut from near full-time coverage on Al-Arabiya to a brief mention late in the evening on BBC World. Most international media covering the elections were from the Middle and Gulf region countries. However, CNN at the last minute dispatched a correspondent and several U.S. newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times either used stringers or covered events from afar. Local broadcast coverage was round-the-clock and Kuwaiti newspapers, waiting for final results to come in, issued late editions on the morning after elections. The following is a round up of the major local and international entities that covered Election Day.

Kuwait TV

13. (U) The public television station Kuwait TV (KTV1) began its special expanded election coverage at 8:00 a.m. and continued

broadcasting into the night as results were made available. KTV1 reporters monitored polling stations in each of the 25 electoral districts from which live reports were aired throughout the day. Early coverage focused on voter turnout with an emphasis on women. By mid-afternoon, the station was reporting voting participation rates for some districts from the opening of polls at 8:00 a.m. to noon. Women voters were interviewed live at all the polling stations, all of whom gave enthusiastic and positive assessments of the voting process and the meaning of the day. Most comments acknowledged the historic achievement of women voting for the first time. Most women also expressed delight in being able to participate. Few men voters were interviewed. Joining the KTV1 anchor host were two political commentators, a deputy editor of the pan-Arab daily newspaper Al-Hayat and a professor of politics at Kuwait University. After the polls closed at 8:00 p.m., the broadcast ran late into the night reporting returns. The Minister of Information's much touted "state-of-the-art" coverage (reftel) was evident with eye-catching graphics and charts that illustrated up-to-the-minute results for all electoral districts. Notably absent from public TV were interviews with candidates.

Al-Rai TV  
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14. (U) Differing markedly from public TV was Election Day coverage by the private Al-Rai television. Candidates from across the political spectrum were regularly interviewed. During one segment, two ended up in a shouting match over election issues, which was broadcast live. Whereas Kuwait TV aired only positive comments of women voters, Al-Rai broadcast complaints from voters that the polling stations were unorganized, that the lines were too long. Some voters complained on air that they had witnessed vote-buying taking place at the polls. Al-Rai also broadcast discussions with Kuwaiti political activists whereas public TV featured academicians

KUWAIT 00002601 002 OF 003

and media specialists.

Al-Arabiya  
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15. (U) The Al-Arabiya pan-Arab satellite news channel devoted extensive coverage to the Kuwaiti elections throughout the day. Approximately 70 percent of morning and afternoon airtime focused exclusively on events in Kuwait. The channel broadcast regular live reports from correspondents who were dispatched to polling stations throughout the country to interview voters and poll officials. The channel also featured discussions with political leaders and commentators, including a former Minister of Planning, the editor-in-chief of a large daily newspaper as well as candidates of all political persuasions. The guests discussed women voters, analyzed the campaign and commented on key election issues such as corruption, vote-buying, redistricting and others, including women, marriage and stateless persons living in Kuwait. On a segment about the unprecedented alignment of liberal and conservative candidates on the issue of corruption, the commentator Dr. Ali Al-Moussa, a former Minister of Planning, described this truce as "nothing more than temporary" and for the sake of convenience in order to get elected. After the polls closed, coverage lessened to about 30 percent of airtime and featured still more commentators addressing the day's events and predicting results. The channel's Election Day reporting also included a piece on the composition of Kuwait's different parliaments starting with 1992. The day's coverage wrapped up at 12:45 a.m. on June 30.

Al-Jazeera  
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16. (U) In sharp contrast to Al-Arabiya, the pan-Arab satellite news channel Al-Jazeera provided only sporadic coverage of the Kuwaiti elections. Reporting and footage emphasized women's participation and stressed the slim likelihood of a female candidate being elected. Also stressed was voter turnout, which was described "as heated as the hot summer weather," a reference to the 117 degree temperature in Kuwait. The report noted that the emphasis in the election campaign fixated on rooting out corruption. The early a.m.

coverage on June 30 began reporting district returns and featured comments by candidates and political commentators in Kuwait. A 1:00 a.m. report featured a comment by Dr. Abdullah Al-Shayji who said, "This election is an important message from the people to the government. The government should clean up its act and listen to what the people want. This election can be considered a referendum."

#### International Satellite Media

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17. (U) Several major international news channels, including CNN, BBC World, and France2, dispatched correspondents to Kuwait to report on Election Day. CNN began broadcasting reports in the late afternoon after its correspondent had visited several polling sites and spoke with candidates, voters and polling officials. The visuals aired showed busy polling stations with long lines and also featured shots from afar of voters depositing ballots. The channel aired clips of a Kuwaiti official who commented how good it is to have sisters, mothers and daughters voting in this bastion of male-dominated politics. The Kuwait's first appointed female minister, Planning Minister Masouma Mubarak, praised women's participation and noted that this is the culmination of a 40-year fight for by Kuwaiti women for full political rights. "Today is a great victory," she said, and one that was "not given to women, but rather won." The BBC was late to report on elections in this former British protectorate. The first report aired after 11:00 p.m. using CNN's footage.

#### Kuwait Print Media

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19. (U) Editions of Kuwait's five Arab-language and two English-language newspapers did not hit the streets until late morning June 30, the day after elections. However, while the hard copy rolled off the presses, most papers posted polling results on their websites. The headlines focused on two key results, women's historic participation, and the makeup of the new Parliament. Arabic daily Al-Qabas' front-page headlines included, "The Government Lost, the National and Constitutional Islamic Movement Won, "Woman Was the Star of Election 2006," "Overall Participation rate 65%, women 35%," and "Women Chose Reformists and Islamists." Al-Anbaa Arabic daily chose the following headline, "May God Bless the Women of This Country; You Did Not Win, But You Did Well." Another Arabic daily Al-Seyassah announced, "Women Did Not Have Good Luck, Voters Elected a Male Assembly," "Strong Comeback for the 29

KUWAIT 00002601 003 OF 003

Block and a Resonant Fall for Independents," and "Clear Progress for the Muslim Brotherhood." Every edition was saturated with election coverage. Al-Seyassah, for example, devoted 45 of its 46-page edition to nothing but election coverage. Most outlets printed tables showing the winners in each district and, on inside pages, the full tally of each candidate's showing in every district. All the papers were heavy on photographs highlighting women at polling stations, Kuwaitis gathered to watch results, and victorious candidates. Because the papers came out so late, editorials from the editors-in-chief were not included. Most editors are expected to print their analysis in the July 1 editions.

#### Blogs -- Youth and Women Speak

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19. (U) Many Kuwaitis posted on the Internet their analysis and sentiments about Election Day. The most prolific bloggers are the younger generation of reformists. One bemoaned the loss of a reformist candidate and advocated for the continuation of the movement. On he wrote, "Corruption forces in Dhayiha have succeeded in eliminating Al-Haroon and Al-Nibari. But this is not the end of the road. It is just the beginning." Female bloggers posted their feelings about voting for the first time. "Waking up early this morning and preparing myself to go to the polling station I felt like it was Eid (a Muslim holiday). That is the continuous feeling today, one of joy and happiness at being able to witness and participate in this important historical event," one female blogger penned on the site . At one point during the late

evening, a blogger complained about Internet censorship when a popular site appeared to be blocked. "Quality Net (an Internet service provider) has been playing around with Ayya's blog. First it was blocked and then every time we try to access it we are taken instead to Sa7atSafat (another blog site). This happened after she posted a very juicy story about Marzouq Al-Ghanem's crooked ways of transferring votes to Dahia Abdullah Al-Salem," he wrote. Blog sites on Election Day were also forums for calls for action. One site urged Kuwaitis to vote and afterward to gather to a public square to watch returns together on a large-screen TV. "The war against corruption will continue regardless of the results . . . the orange tide will not be stopped," the blogger announced on . Other sample comments posted throughout the day were "Vote and save your country," on and "Vote, vote, vote and stay hydrated," on .

¶10. (U) Comment: Local TV coverage of Election Day highlighted the gap between how the public and private broadcast sectors view their role in Kuwaiti society. The polished but placid coverage by Kuwait TV underscored its link to the government and the associated limitations in serving as a public watchdog. By contrast, Kuwait's private Al-Rai TV and the pan-Arab satellite channels reported on controversial issues and presented a wider range of opinion. These examples are an indication of the capacity of the private Arab media to function in the public interest.

¶11. (U) The disparity in the amount of coverage by Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya was a reflection of those stations' differing interest in and relations with Kuwait. Al-Jazeera on Election Day focused heavily on events in Gaza and offered only sparse coverage of the Kuwaiti elections. This underscores Al-Jazeera's view of itself as a more international or broad-based news channel. It can also be seen as a manifestation of uneasy ties between Al-Jazeera and Kuwait stemming from Kuwait's support for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya's extensive coverage of Election Day revealed the keen interest on the part of neighboring countries in Kuwaiti women voting for the first time. The majority of the international media present to cover the Kuwaiti elections were from the Middle East and the Gulf region, a further indication of regional interest in women voters and development of democracy in the region. The participation of women was certainly the main attraction for the relatively impressive showing of other Western media in Kuwait for Election Day. End comment.

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